



# Arizona Department of Agriculture

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Desert Botanical Gardens to host International 'Cactus Moth' Conference**

(Phoenix, AZ) – The Desert Botanical Gardens will host the first ever International *Cactoblastis cactorum* Conference from May 7<sup>th</sup> through May 10<sup>th</sup> in Phoenix, Arizona. Also hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), this conference will convene scientists, regulatory officials, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders from around the world to discuss the current status of the *Cactoblastis cactorum*, or 'cactus moth,' in North America. This pest threatens to destroy the pricklypear cactus population and other "pad cacti" in North America. USDA's Agricultural Research Service and APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine program scientists are conducting research to slow the spread the moth.

Indigenous to Argentina, this moth lays its eggs on the paddle of a Cactus. After hatching, the moth larvae burrow into the plant and cause physical damage by hollowing out and destroying the cactus. This pest has had a devastating affect on Mexico's pricklypear cacti, that are important to Mexicans both economically and culturally. The moth was first discovered in the U.S. in the Florida Keys in 1989. It has since eaten its way up the eastern seaboard to Charleston, South Carolina, and as far west as Dauphin Island, Alabama, where APHIS is holding the line through host removal and sterile moth release programs.

In the U.S., the USDA estimates that the pricklypear cactus has a trade, nursery, landscape, crop, and forage value of up to \$70 million a year, mainly in the Southwest. Environmentally, cacti prevent erosion and are a habitat and food source for many species of invertebrate, birds, mammals and other animals. In Arizona, in addition to the cultural value of the pricklypear, which was recently selected to be featured on the state's quarter, the economic value is significant. In Arizona, the ornamental pricklypear cactus industry encompasses over half a million plants with a wholesale and retail value estimated to be more than \$15 million. There have been no discoveries in Arizona, but the Arizona Department of Agriculture has proactively set up a cactus moth trapping program and is working with volunteer organizations around the state to monitor for the presence of this pest.

This conference will feature presenters who will report on recent findings in research, detection results, and the control measures of the cactus moth as well as develop awareness about the threat to areas where the cactus moth does not occur.

For more information about the threat of *Cactoblastis cactorum* go to:  
[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant\\_health/plant\\_pest\\_info/cactoblastis/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/cactoblastis/index.shtml)

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